



VOICES & VISIONS

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

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TAP Program Continues to Expand Vision

by Kathy Clark

Exciting things are happening within the *Theology Among the People* (TAP) program these days! TAP is an ecumenical theological education program of the Southeast Conference whose mission is to bring theology into the midst of the people of God to equip them for the work of ministry and the building up of the Body of Christ. TAP helps participants discover their own theology and develop ministerial skills within the context of locally based intentional learning communities.

Currently, 10 TAP groups with over 50 participants function in four states throughout the Conference. A facilitator leads groups of five to ten people who commit to a three year course of study and practice in the arts of ministry. In Midway, Georgia; Charleston, South Carolina; Knoxville, Tennessee; Huntsville, Alabama—and several other communities in between—men and women meet regularly to study Scripture, explore Christian history and the polity of the United Church of Christ, and develop skills in preaching, administration, liturgical planning, and pastoral care. At the same time, they share faith with one another and together discern the movement of the spirit in their midst.



Participants in a TAP group at Midway Congregational Church, Midway, GA, study the epistles of Paul.

This year, the Southeast Conference entered into a collaborative relationship with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ in the Georgia region to develop a leadership training program using the TAP model. Following the example of a successful relationship with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ in the Alabama region, four groups of Disciples participants have formed in Lawrenceville, Athens, and Monroe. The Conference is exploring ecumenical relationships with other denominations that experience a

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Don't Forget!!
Register for the Annual Meeting
June 13-14, 2003
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"I will pour out my Spirit upon all... and your young shall see visions and your old shall dream dreams." Acts 2:17



A Letter from the Conference Minister

Signs of God's Peace

Dear Friends,

In the last several weeks, we have watched our television screens as the machines of warfare growl across the deserts of Iraq and into its cities. In the midst of conflicting reports I was again reminded of the quote, "Truth is the first casualty of warfare." Partisans on all sides seek the sympathies of people around the globe, with pictures and accounts of human suffering on the part of all soldiers and civilians. Reports of injustices are made by one side then the other.

What I do know to be true is this: A nation whose boundaries embrace the cradle of human civilization has been ravaged. A brutal dictator has systematically tortured, imprisoned, and killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis to maintain an iron and oppressive grip on the people. Since 1990, what was once a thriving country with a prosperous middle-class has been devastated and driven into poverty by an economic embargo. And now as the violent first wave of warfare subsides, Iraq hangs in the balance while political interests and ethnic groups begin to jockey for power and position. These are dangerous and uncertain times.

As Christians, we are called to be signs of God's peace and

healing where the world is broken and torn. Our efforts should be marked at each step by an unceasing prayer for all those in harm's way. As surely as God shows no partiality or favoritism toward any of God's children, so should our prayers be for all. One preacher recently quoting William Sloane Coffin remarked, "It is time for the United States not to lead the world but to join it." Our faith calls us to lift up the awareness that our nation is part of a fabric of humanity and nations rich and complex in their diversity, yet called to live in peace, in the light of freedom and justice.

Below you will find an invitation to participate in the Olive Branch Appeal for the Iraqi humanitarian crisis. This appeal will provide relief to care for children and refugees impacted by poverty and war. Through our partners in the Middle East, the Middle East Council of Churches has established relief centers in Baghdad, Bosra, Mosul, and Kirkuk. We are not helpless in this time nor do we need to be satisfied with prayers alone. Through the United Church of Christ and with partner denominations we can respond to God's call to be peacemakers and

healers. I invite you to faithful witness.

In the Spirit of Peace,
Timothy C. Downs

"Grace to you, and peace..."



Olive Branch Appeal to Aid Iraq

Wider Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ has issued the Olive Branch Appeal for the Iraq humanitarian crisis. A total of \$115,000 from the One

Great Hour of Sharing offering has already been sent to international partners to respond to the escalating crisis. An additional \$300,000 in designated gifts is sought from UCC members and friends. For more than a decade the world's largest humanitarian relief effort has been underway throughout Iraq. With the onset of war, the crisis is expected to expand exponentially. Based on our experience in

the Balkans and Afghanistan, there will be substantial need for rehabilitation following the end of the military campaign for a period of several years.

Please consider a designated gift to support the Olive Branch Appeal. Make a check payable to your local congregation and ask that it be sent through your Conference to Wider Church Ministries, designated *Olive Branch Appeal*. Following this process enables your congregation and Conference to include your donation in the special OCWM reports. For additional information or to make a secure on-line donation, visit the web site at <http://ucc.org/disaster/olive.htm>.

TAP Program Continues to Expand Vision

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need for a lay ministry formation and leadership development program designed to meet the needs of cultural, racial, ethnic, and economic diversity that characterizes the Protestant church in the southeastern United States. Conversations are also taking place with institutions of higher learning, including Piedmont College, and Eden, Lancaster, and United Seminaries, to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen the program and expand its learning opportunities.



TAP group from Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga engages in lively discussion on the gospel of Mark.

TAP was introduced to the Southeast Conference four years ago under the creative leadership of Rev. Dr. Dick Sales. Rev. Sales modeled the TAP program after a successful program of theological education, also known as theological education by extension, that he developed in a southern Africa mission field that was void of seminary opportunities to train local pastors. Thirty years later, that program is still ongoing and serves as a true witness to the abundance of God's grace in equipping leaders for ministry in an area marked by a scarcity of resources. TAP has now been adapted to the special needs and charisms of our part of the world. Here and abroad—indeed, wherever programs of alternative theological education function successfully—the United Church of Christ and its ecumenical partners are seeking to fulfill the mandate of our Constitution and By-laws to “undergird the ministry of its members by nurturing faith, calling forth gifts, and equipping members for Christian service.”

Four years after the TAP program was launched, the first groups are preparing to graduate in a special recognition ceremony prior to the annual meeting of the conference. Each TAP graduate successfully completes seven courses,

including a “Master Class” in which each engaged in a “master” learning project that is shared with their group. In TAP groups, it is hard to tell the learners and teachers apart, for all members serve in both capacities to another. In addition to theological content and ministerial practices, participants develop the skills to be lifelong learners of God's Word.

Even as graduates prepare to leave the program, new folks are beginning. TAP strives to be affordable and accessible to all who feel called to participate and starting a TAP group only takes five people who are committed to a group learning process. Currently, new TAP groups are forming in Chattanooga, Tennessee and Atlanta, Georgia. Throughout the conference, individuals are growing; congregations are being transformed; and the Spirit is being let loose on the church and the world as faithful men and women are finding new ways to live out the ministry of Jesus Christ to which each of us has been called.

Kathy Clark is the Director of the TAP program. For information about starting a TAP group in your congregation or to request a brochure, you may contact her at kclark@secucc.org or call 404-251-9660.

VOICES & VISIONS

A publication of the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ

The mission of Voices & Vision is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members.

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Conference to Offer Volunteer Training for Renewed OCWM Focus

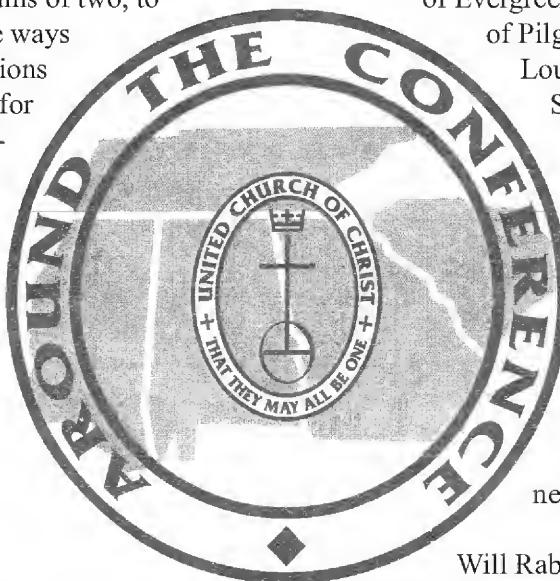
Our Church's Wider Mission supports numerous vital missions and ongoing ministry programs throughout the country and our conference. As a part of the continuing efforts of the Southeast Conference to develop awareness of OCWM Basic Support and the ministries it makes possible, the board is recruiting volunteers to be trained to visit all of our congregations, in teams of two, to speak about OCWM and to explore ways the conference can serve congregations more effectively. The first training for these teams will take place September 5-6. Persons interested in being a part of this important outreach should contact Tim Downs at 404-607-1993 or tdowns@secucc.org.

Valuable Community Information and Ministry Resources Available for Congregations

This spring, additional congregations participated in the training for the use of *Percept*, a comprehensive database and on line program for planning, mission development, and leadership evaluation and development. Numerous resources are available to congregations in the Southeast Conference at no charge when you sign up at www.Link2Lead.com. Churches interested in training should contact John Mingus at pilgrim@chattanooga.com.

Southeast Conference Steps Up Preparation to Respond to Disasters

Following recent training in Tallahassee, FL, the Southeast Conference now has ten Regional Disaster Coordinators. Will Rabert, SEC Disaster Relief Coordinator, reports that a three day training was completed by Jackie Fowler of Community, Montgomery; Rev. Larry Calbert, of Rush Memorial, Atlanta; Rev. and Dr. Artis and Myrtle Johnson of Evergreen, Beachton, GA; Lowell Bennington of Pilgrim; and Alice Cintron, Linda Clay, Louise Covington, Leigh Dietz, and Sandra Gordon of God, Self and Neighbor Ministries, Atlanta, GA. Training was led by Rabert and the Rev. William Wealand, Disaster relief Coordinator of the Florida Conference. These UCC Conferences are in partnership with each other and are working on congregational partnerships, where each will serve as hosts for one another when a disaster occurs near the Florida-Georgia border.



Office Support Staff Network Holds Annual Meeting

The Southeast Conference was privileged to welcome the Office Support Staff Network to Atlanta, GA for its annual meeting on April 25-27, 2003. With the theme *Many Gifts, One Spirit*, over ten workshops offered challenging education for professionals who support the ministries of our churches throughout the nation. Keynote speaker, Rev. Joyce Hollyday, and inspiring worship and music were highlights of this year's meeting. Appreciation is extended to First Congregational Church for hosting the event.



Gerri Hudson, Administrative Assistance for the Southeast Conference, served as Chair of this year's planning committee. Also serving were Dorcas Doward and Bette Thomas, First Congregational Church, Atlanta; and Tara McCrary, Central Congregational Church, Atlanta.

Concerns & Celebrations

Our Sympathy

•*Rev. Ralph Worley*, retired minister, died in April. He last served North Main Congregational Christian Church in Roanoke, Alabama. He is survived by his son and daughter.

•The funeral for Melva Strauch was held on March 15. The wife of *Rev. Paul Strauch*, they served actively in ministry in the United Church of Christ in many congregations.

Our Prayers

•*Dr. Kathi Martin*, pastor of GSN Ministries, UCC, Atlanta, requests prayer for her parents as her father struggles with diabetes related complications.

•Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Birmingham is entering a period of transition upon the departure of their pastor *Rev. Elaine Blanchard*. They are being led at this time by a United Methodist minister, Bud Precis.

•Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Chattanooga, led by *Dr. John Mingus*, is entering the next phase of exploring whether to become an open and affirming congregation, following vigorous conversation in recent months.

Our Celebrations

•Center Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, is entering a period of renewal under the leadership of their new pastor, *Rev. Steve deClasse-Walford*.

•Open Community UCC recently called *Rev. Soo Man Chung* to serve as pastor. Rev. Chung succeeds *Rev. Kwan Chi*, who has returned to Emory University to complete his doctoral degree.

•New Life UCC, under the leadership of *Dr. Lewis Tait*, with the assistance of the Conference and the national UCC is in the last phases of preparing for the closing on

the building being purchased for them by the Southeast Conference in Tucker, GA.

•*Rev. Mary Brueggemann*, retired UCC minister and member of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta and *Rev. Tom Warren*, Pastor of Pleasant Hill Community Church, UCC, Pleasant Hill TN, returned in February from a remarkable trip to Cuba which was led by *Rev. Ted Braun*, retired UCC minister.

•*Rev. Dorothea Lotze-Kola* achieved the status of full supervisor in CPE. She currently serves at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Scottish Rite.

•Columbia Theological Seminary recently held a celebration in honor of the retirement of *Dr. Walter Brueggemann*, a leading scholar of Old Testament studies who has taught for 42 years at Columbia and before that at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis.

•*Dr. Dwight Andrews*, Pastor of First Congregational Church, UCC, Atlanta, was appointed to a fellowship at Yale University. Dr. Andrews will continue to teach at Emory University as well as serve First Congregational Church.

•First Congregational Church, Atlanta is planning a \$6 million renovation of their historic church building, the first step of several for the renewal of their church facilities and ministries.

•On May 11, Central Congregational Church UCC, Atlanta, held a service of dedication for the completion of their renovations.

•Church of the Savior, Knoxville, also celebrates the completion of major renovations to its sanctuary and parish house on May 11.

•Organizing United Church in Cookeville, TN was accepted as a UCC new church start and celebrates their move into a new facility.

A Call to Youth Leaders

If you are a lay or ordained person who works with the young people in our churches, we invite you to the Youth Ministers Gathering, to be held on Friday, June 13 from 1:00 – 3:30 preceding the annual meeting of the Southeast Conference. Betsy Flory, Director of Youth Ministries, will facilitate a session for youth leaders - an opportunity to think and talk about why we do what we do, and a

chance to spend time with our companions in the faith who take up the mysterious and wonderful call of youth ministry. During this time, adults from Pilgrim Church, UCC will engage the youth. For additional information and registration materials see the annual meeting call package or the newsletter insert. Please come!

Highlights of Board of Directors Meeting

The Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference met in Montgomery, AL on March 21-22. Appreciation is extended to Community Congregational Church, UCC who hosted this meeting. The highlights of the discussion and decisions are as follows:

- Joyce Hollyday reported that the Rekindle the Gift project is going very well as it reaches the end of its research phase as Joyce and Susan Mitchell complete the collection of oral histories from our AMA congregations. Joyce will soon dedicate herself full time to the writing the story of the AMA coming to the South, from the Amistad until Civil Rights. The working title of the book is *On the Heels of Freedom*.
- TAP (*Theology Among the People*) continues to expand its program. Kathy Clark, the Director of the program, reported that the first students will graduate in June. As Kathy leaves her position at Emory University to be full-time with TAP and other ministries in the Conference, we anticipate major changes in the program as it extends itself to equipping ordained clergy for professional development as well as training lay leaders.
- DART (Disaster Relief Ministries of the Conference), led by Will Rabert, took pride in an excellent response team training event held in collaboration with the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA, and the Florida Conference of the UCC.

- The Board accepted the Organizing United Church of Cookeville, TN as a new church start in the Southeast Conference. In addition, a group is in conversation about a new church start in southwest Atlanta.
- The Board continued to review the budget deficit for 2002 and will look closely at expenses and salaries for the coming year. Though the board is hopeful that congregational support will increase, if necessary, the Finance Committee will be asked to make recommendations about possible reductions in the 2003 budget.
- Board members volunteered to deliver thank you certificates to congregations who made contributions to OCWM.
- The conference is exploring ways to encourage mission partnerships between missionaries and congregations throughout the conference.
- Two ministers in the Southeast Conference were called to bring focus to two important ministries in the conference. Tom Baird, of Knoxville, TN, was called to serve as Coordinator of Interim Ministries for the Conference and Joe Ingle of Nashville, TN was called to serve as Minister for Prison Outreach for the Conference.
- The Board voted unanimously to purchase the campus in Tucker, GA for New Life UCC. The Southeast Conference will own the property until the congregation is in a financial position to purchase it.

Conference Calendar

May

22 **EAL/WGA Church & Ministry Committee Meeting**, Ryan's Restaurant, LaGrange, GA
26 **Memorial Day**, Conference Office Closed
29 **Ascension Day**

June

7 **GA/SC Church & Ministry Committee Meeting**, Church of the Savior, Roswell, GA
8 **Strengthen the Church Special Mission Offering**
12 **TAP Convocation**, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Chattanooga, TN
13-14 **37th SEC Annual Meeting**, Pilgrim Congregational Church, Chattanooga, TN
15 **Father's Day**
25 **46th Anniversary of the United Church of Christ**

July

4 **Independence Day**, Conference Office Closed
10-15 **The Twenty-fourth UCC General Synod**, Minneapolis, MN, Conference Office Closed

Southeast Feast

Food for the Heart and Soul

By Joyce Hollyday

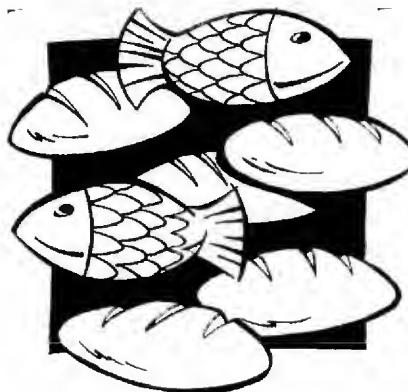


The Miracle of Generosity

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves...and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled.

Mark 6:41-42

It's a familiar story, known commonly as "feeding the five thousand." But the crowd was actually much larger. The scripture says that only the men were included in the count. This gathering was a lot like church, so you know there were more women there than men. And wherever you've got women and men, there are bound to be lots of children. So, we're talking a crowd of thirty thousand or more. Christians throughout the ages have been stumped about how this massive group feasted on five loaves and two measly fish. It was a miracle, to be sure. But maybe it went something like this.



People knew when they left their homes that it was going to be a long day, out there listening to Jesus and getting healed. So they tucked a little bread, some dates and olives, perhaps a little goat cheese, into their pockets. As they watched the group swell, they hid what

they had, fearing that if anybody discovered they had food, they'd never get to eat it themselves. Sure, they'd brought a little extra, but not enough for that crowd. They tucked their smoked fish right into their sleeves, hoping nobody would smell it there.

But there was this little boy. He was just a kid; he didn't know any better. He didn't know that he was supposed to be fearful and protective, to watch out for himself first. So when the disciples came through the crowd with their baskets, he threw his dinner right in. When Jesus took the boy's food and raised it to heaven, perhaps his prayer went

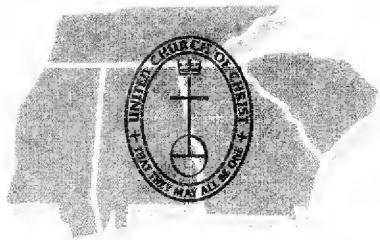
something like this: "Thank you, God, for this young boy, who has shown us all what it means to belong to the realm of God. Thank you that he has modeled generosity and compassion. May we be more like him." After that, as the disciples went through the crowd to divvy up the meal, people were so moved that they threw in their own dinners. The bread and fish and dates and figs just kept growing. There was enough for all—and plenty left over.

This is a story about perceived scarcity and real abundance. I first heard an interpretation like the one recounted above in a base community in Nicaragua. I heard it a second time from a homeless person in Atlanta. In both cases, these were people who knew real scarcity, who understood from the perspective of their own poverty how God would have worked this miracle.

As I write this, I'm well aware that the U.S. stock market has fallen, that giving is down all over the country, that there's a war on and rumors of recession. But I also know—and am astounded every time I hear it—that the majority of the people on our globe live on the equivalent of two dollars per day or less.

I urge us not to lapse into thinking that we are in a time of scarcity. We in the Southeast Conference are wealthy beyond measure. And we are blessed beyond telling by what God is doing among us. We've stepped out in faith to launch the ministries that have been revitalizing the Conference, and we will all be better off if they continue.

My hope is that we will be generous with our dollars, in support of all that God has called us to do together. But even more important, I urge us to be extravagant in our prayers. God has brought us this far by faith, and I trust that God will continue to carry us forward. May we live in these difficult days as people who believe in miracles.



MANY VOICES, ONE IN CHRIST

***Southeast Conference of the
United Church of Christ***

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*If I say, "Surely the darkness
will overwhelm me, And the
light around me will be
night," Even the darkness is
not dark to Thee, And the
night is as bright as the day.*

Psalm 139:11-12a



*When the glare obscures our vision,
come to us from darkness hidden,
tendering your words of soothing,
smoothing down the shards of day.
And in the night where violence rages,
touch the wounds of souls courageous
who wage their peace with open hands
dancing where the shadows play. Amen*

*Jan L. Richardson
From *In Wisdom's Path**